

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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Statement of Environment Subcommittee Chairman Jim Bridenstine (R-Okla.)
Advancing Commercial Weather Data: Collaborative Efforts to Improve Forecasts

Chairman Bridenstine: Good morning and welcome to this hearing of the Subcommittee on the Environment.

First, I would like to acknowledge that last night the House passed H.R. 1561, the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2015. I want to thank Chairman Smith for his continued leadership on this issue. I thank the Committee Vice Chairman, Mr. Lucas for his sponsorship of the bill. As a fellow Oklahoman, I know he understands the vital need for this bill, and his involvement has been crucial to the success of H.R. 1561. I also want to thank the Ranking Member of the Environment Subcommittee, Ms. Bonamici, for being the lead co-sponsor. This bill is the result of a bipartisan agreement and is stronger for it. The Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act will improve our ability to accurately predict the weather and save lives and property.

This week the Senate also introduced weather legislation, and I am glad they are beginning to look at an issue the House has been working on for a few years now. I look forward to working with our Senate counterparts, and would also encourage them to take up the H.R. 1561 so that we can set in motion the improvements needed to better predict the weather.

Today's hearing continues this subcommittee's focus on how the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA, uses weather data to enhance their forecasting capability, how and where they get that necessary data, and how these processes can be improved.

A main tenant of our now House-passed weather legislation is its recognition of the role commercial weather data can play as a piece of the solutions available to NOAA. A previous hearing of this Subcommittee looked into issues with NOAA's satellite programs that could lead to gaps in data.

That hearing served to underscore my belief that we need to augment our space-based observing systems by incorporating alternative methods of data collection.

Today we will hear from experts across multiple disciplines to better understand how NOAA currently incorporates external data, as well as what options are available to NOAA outside of traditional sources.

For example, NOAA already purchases limited commercial data for various modeling and forecasts. These partnerships can serve as a model as NOAA necessarily evolves to meet its critical mission.

Likewise, hosted payloads offer additional flexibility to the Agency by providing space on commercial satellites that can host weather instruments and sensors, including proprietary NOAA instruments.

International partnerships also play an important role. Namely, NOAA's satellite partnership with the Europeans has historically been crucial when faced with satellite failures. Our partnership with Taiwan on the COSMIC and COSMIC-2 programs demonstrates the value of a new weather technology that will increase our ability to predict severe weather events in the near future.

Information from commercial aircraft sensors could also factor more into our data streams than it currently does. Additionally, we should look at how our unmanned aerial systems play into this. In Oklahoma, there are people working every day to incorporate UAS into the airspace, including how they could be utilized to monitor the weather in areas where passenger aircraft do not fly.

One issue that will need to be addressed as new options for continuous, robust, and cost-effective data streams are explored, is how NOAA shares the information it receives. This is a sensitive subject, but it needs to be discussed. I am concerned that a viable commercial weather industry will face challenges to mature under NOAA's current interpretation of our international obligations regarding access to data.

However, we know that in practice NOAA does in fact purchase some commercial data that they do not share, and that our international obligations are much more nuanced.

I know that Dr. Stephen Volz, head of NESDIS, has signaled his openness to commercial data, and I appreciate his forward-looking view. However, he and other NOAA officials have couched their support with the caveat that data must be made available, for free, to all.

I'd like to use this hearing to kick start the conversation on how we can craft a data policy that meets our international obligations, provides access to researchers and the academic community, and does not prevent the growth of this nascent industry.

I look forward to a lively discussion today that highlights the possibilities available to NOAA to add new sources of data and flexibility to enhance our weather forecasting systems.

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